NCA

VOC FOR IOP/FN

NEWS ANALYSIS NO. 1-0175 FEBRUARY 13, 1976
CHRIS KERN

PATTY HEARST ON TRIAL

ANNCR:

THE PROSECUTION IS NEARING THE END OF (HAS CONCLUDED) ITS CASE AGAINST PATRICIA HEARST, THE AMERICAN NEWSPAPER HEIRESS WHO IS ACCUSED OF WILLINGLY PARTICIPATING IN A BANK ROBBERY AFTER HER KIDNAPPING BY A RADICAL CULT GROUP. THE TRIAL HAS RECEIVED UNUSUAL PUBLICITY BOTH HERE IN THE UNITED STATES AND IN OTHER COUNTRIES, AND HERE'S CHRIS KERN'S ANALYSIS.

VOICE:

THE TRIAL HAS JUST ABOUT EVERYTHING THAT'S NEEDED TO CAPTURE THE PUBLIC'S IMAGINATION. THE RICH GIRL DEFENDANT, A MEMBER OF ONE OF THIS COUNTRY'S MOST PROMINENT PUBLISHING FAMILIES. HER FLAMBOYANT ATTORNEY, AN ACKNOWLEDGED EXPERT IN CONDUCTING A DIFFICULT CRIMINAL DEFENSE. RADICAL POLITICS, IN THE FORM OF THE CULT GROUP THAT CALLED ITSELF THE SYMBIONESE LIBERATION ARMY. KIDNAPPING AND SEX AND VIOLENCE AND, ALMOST INCIDENTLY, THE CRIME THAT PATTY HEARST IS ON TRIAL FOR COMMITTING -- THE ROBBERY OF A SAN FRANCISCO BANK.

THE TRIAL IS SERIOUS BUSINESS, BUT IT HAS ALL THE ELEMENTS OF A MEDIA SPECTACLE, AND SO IT HAS BECOME. REPORTERS FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD GET THEIR STORIES SPLASHED ACROSS THE FRONT PAGES AND FLASHED ACROSS THE TELEVISION SCREENS. AND THE ANTICIPATED CLIMAX MAY ONLY BE A FEW DAYS OFF: PATTY HEARST IN THE WITNESS STAND, THIS TIME BEFORE THE JURY OF SEVEN WOMEN AND FIVE MEN WHO WILL DECIDE IF SHE IS TO GO TO PRISON.

SHE IS NOT REQUIRED TO TESTIFY IN HER OWN DEFENSE, BUT THE BETTING IS THAT SHE WILL DO SO BECAUSE PATTY HEARST'S TESTIMONY MAY BE THE ONLY WAY TO CONTRADICT THE PROSECUTION'S STAR WITNESS: PATTY HEARST, IN A TAPED MESSAGE THAT WAS RECORDED BEFORE HER CAPTURE BY THE FBI, DECLARING THAT SHE WILLINGLY TOOK PART IN THE BANK ROBBERY WITH WHAT SHE CALLED HER SYMBIONESE LIBERATION ARMY "COMRADES."

NOW HER STORY HAS CHANGED, AND SHE SAYS THAT SHE WAS FORCED TO HELP IN THE BANK HOLD-UP, THAT SHE WAS A VICTIM OF THE TERROR AND MENTAL STRESS IMPOSED BY HER CAPTORS. THE JURY WILL HAVE TO DECIDE WHICH PATTY HEARST TO BELIEVE -- PATTY HEARST THE SELF-PROCLAIMED REVOLUTIONARY OR PATTY HEARST THE FRIGHTENED LITTLE GIRL.

THE IRONY IS THAT UNLIKE SOME HIGHLY-PUBLICIZED TRIALS -- LIKE THOSE OF ANGELA DAVIS OR THE SO-CALLED "CHICAGO SEVEN" -- THERE ARE NO REAL POLITICAL OVERTONES IN THIS CASE, NO SUGGESTION THAT PATTY HEARST'S ALLEGED RADICAL VIEWS HAD ANY PART IN THE GOVERNMENT'S DECISION TO PROSECUTE. IT IS PUBLIC SPECTACLE ALL THE WAY, AND IN THAT RESPECT, MAYBE A SIGN OF CHANGING TIMES IN THIS COUNTRY: A TRIUMPH FOR SENSATIONALISM OVER POLITICS.

WJL/RCS